not dependent on them. She had no wish to live with anybody, she thought, except of course, him. "I . . love . . him," she said beneath her breath. Once again the pain was back in her heart.

It was two minutes to twelve when Luella looked at herself in the mirror. She realised that without thinking about it she had put on her prettiest gown. It had a small bolero to wear over it. The hat which matched it was trimmed with blue flowers.

"You looks ever so lovely, Miss!" the maid said as if she had asked the question.

"Thank you, Ethel," Luella replied.

As she reached the top of the stairs, she saw that the Duke was waiting for her in the hall. It was with the utmost difficulty that she managed to walk down them slowly. She wanted desperately to run and be with him. He was looking exceedingly smart and more handsome than ever.

"I must commend you on being so punctual," he said. While he spoke conventionally, his eyes were saying things which made her heart beat furiously. He seemed to take her breath away.

The carriage was waiting outside and to her surprise the Duke was not driving it. There were a coachman and a footman on the box. The butler and six footmen saw them off. Luella was aware that there was a brake behind to carry the luggage. The servants bowed as they drove off.

The Duke took Luella's hand. "You are very beautiful, my darling," he said softly.

"Th . . that is . . what I want . . you to think,"

Luella replied in a whisper. It was somehow difficult to speak. Her love for him seemed to be surging up inside her.

They drove down Park Lane. When they reached the end of it they turned to the right with the wall of the garden of Buckingham Palace on their left. "Where . . are we . . going?" she asked. "This . . is not . . the way to . . the Castle."

"I had a better idea during the night," the Duke said, "and I am hoping, my precious, it is something of which you will approve."

Luella wanted to say she would approve of anything as long as she could be with him. But she thought it would be a mistake. "I ought . . not to be . . here," she told herself. "I should have . . said goodbye and . . left him. It will only . . make things . . worse when the . . moment comes and I could not . . bear him to be . . unhappy."

Almost as if he knew what she was thinking, the Duke took her hand, lifted it to his lips and kissed it. "Stop worrying and leave everything to me," he said.

Luella looked up at him. Then because he was looking down at her it was impossible to look away. She was suddenly aware that the carriage had come to a standstill. She found to her surprise that they were on the Embankment beside the Thames. "Why are we . . here?" she asked.

"I have something to show you," the Duke answered. He helped her out of the carriage. As they started to walk she saw a little way ahead of them there was a large, important-looking yacht.